

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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FM AMEMBASSY PARIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7720

INFO USLO PEKING

AMCONSUL HONG KONG

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 04167

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, FR, CH

SUBJECT: FRENCH VIEW OF NEW PRC ACTING PRIME MINISTER

REF: PARIS 02728

SUMMARY: FRENCH WERE SURPRISED THAT HUA KUO-FENG HAD BEEN NAMED ACTING PRIME MINISTER AND TENG HSIAO-P'ING HAD NOT BEEN CONFIRMED IN THE ROLE HE HAS PLAYED FOR A YEAR. THE FRENCH THINK THAT THE SITUATION REMAINS FAR FROM CLEAR SINCE OTHER CHANGES IN GOVERNMENT AND PARTY HAVE NOT BEEN ANNOUNCED. THEY THINK IT COULD REPRESENT A RESOLUTION OF PM ASPECT OF THE SUCCESSION PROBLEM (WITHOUT A RESOLUTION OF THE REAL POWER PROBLEM) OR THAT IT IS MERELY AN INTERIM APPOINTMENT WITH NONE OF THE PROBLEMS REALLY SETTLED. THE FRENCH THINK THAT IT IS HARD NOT TO SEE THE NOMINATION AS A LOSS OF FACE AND PERHAPS EVENTUALLY OF POWER FOR TENG. HUA APPEARS TO BE A MODERATE, AND THERE WOULD PROBABLY BE NO CHANGE IN FOREIGN OR DOMESTIC POLICIES. FRENCH WISH TO CONTINUE TO EXCHANGE VIEWS ON PRC DEVELOPMENTS. END SUMMARY

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1. SURPRISE. QUAI DEPUTY DIRECTOR FOR ASIA DUZER TOLD HK CONGEN OFFICER HARTER AND EMBOFF THAT GOF WAS SURPRISED BY THE NOMINATION OF HUA KUO-FENG AS INTERIM PRIME MINISTER. QUAI HAD RECEIVED ONE TELEGRAM FROM PEKING WHICH CONCERNS THE REPORTS THAT HUA WAS NAMED AS ACTING PM UNTIL NPC MEETS TO SELECT PM. DUZER SAID THAT QUAI STILL DOES NOT HAVE FULL CHINESE TEXT NOR REPORT ON THE MANNER IN WHICH THE APPOINTMENT IS PRESENTED TO THE CHINESE PEOPLE TO DETERMINE JUST HOW IT IS BEING PLAYED. QUAI HAD EXPECTED NEARLY AUTOMATIC PROMOTION FOR TENG HSIAO-P'ING (REFTEL). FROM CONTACTS WITH TENG, FRENCH HAD IMPRESSION THAT TENG WAS VERY SURE OF HIMSELF AS ACTING HEAD OF GOVERNMENT DURING LATER STAGES OF CHOU'S ILLNESS AND EXPECTED THIS ROLE TO BE CONFIRMED. THOSE AROUND TENG ACTED TOWARD HIM AS THOUGH THEY SHARED TENG'S ESTIMATE. FRENCH THEREFORE HAD CONCLUDED THAT HIS SUCCESSION TO THE TOP ADMINISTRATIVE POST WAS PART OF THE SUCCESSION SCENARIO; THEY THOUGHT THAT TENG MUST BE JUST AS SURPRISED AS EVERYONE ELSE. THERE HAD BEEN ATTACKS ON TENG, OF WHICH THE REFERENCE IN THE FEBRUARY 6 PEOPLE'S DAILY WAS THE SHARPEST, BUT THE FRENCH HAD CONCLUDED THIS EXCHANGE OF VITUPERATION WAS WITHIN THE RULES OF THE GAME AND DID NOT CHANGE TENG'S POWER POSITION.

2. TWO EXPLANATIONS. DUZER THOUGHT THAT THERE COULD BE TWO EXPLANATIONS OF WHAT WAS HAPPENING, A SIMPLE ONE AND A MORE COMPLICATED ONE. A. DISAGREEMENT WITHIN THE POLITBURO OVER THE SUCCESSION TO CHOU HAD RESULTED IN A DEADLOCK AND HUA WAS CHOSEN AS A COMPROMISE CANDIDATE, WITH THE SUPPORT OF TENG AND HIS MODERATE FACTION. A SUBSEQUENT NPC WOULD CONFIRM HUA AS PM, BUT HE WOULD NEVER HAVE THE PARTY STATUS AND ADMINISTRATIVE INDEPENDENCE WHICH CHOU HAD ENJOYED. THE TWO FACTIONS WOULD CONTINUE TO PLAY OUT THEIR RIVALRY WITHIN THE PARTY AND ADMINISTRATION, A RELATIVELY PERMANENT COMPROMISE WHICH WOULD LEAVE TENG WHERE HE IS AS HEAD OF THE MODERATES. B. THE SUCCESSION WAS REALLY NOT YET SETTLED; HUA'S ROLE WOULD BE CLEARLY TEMPORARY. HE

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WOULD FUNCTION AS NOMINAL PM FOR CEREMONIAL OCCASIONS SUCH AS CONTACTS WITH FOREIGNERS, BUT WOULD NOT BE CONFIRMED IN THE POST. THE NPC MIGHT BE GREATLY DELAYED. THE STRUGGLE WOULD CONTINUE AND IT WAS POSSIBLE THAT TENG COULD THEN LOSE OUT TOTALLY OR EMERGE AS THE PERMANENT PRIME MINISTER. DUZER TENDED TO FAVOR HYPOTHESIS B.

3. AS THE SITUATION NOW STANDS, TENG APPEARS TO HAVE LOST GROUND AND FACE. FURTHER INFORMATION ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE PM AND THE PARTY STRUCTURE MIGHT SHOW AN ENHANCED PARTY POSITION FOR TENG WHICH WOULD COMPENSATE FOR HIS FAILURE TO ACCEDE TO THE TOP

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ADMINISTRATIVE POSITION AS GENERALLY ANTICIPATED. HOWEVER, IT HAD PREVIOUSLY BEEN CONCLUDED, THOUGHT DUZER, THAT THE OPPOSING FACTIONS -- AND CHAIRMAN MAO -- WOULD OPPOSE THE EMERGENCE OF A SINGLE FIGURE WITH HIGH PARTY AND ADMINISTRATIVE FUNCTIONS AND THAT TENG WAS DESTINED FOR ADVANCEMENT IN THE ADMINISTRATIVE NOT PARTY STRUCTURE. HENCE DUZER THOUGHT IT UNLIKELY THAT TENG WOULD HAVE BEEN HAPPY TO ACCEPT A PROBLEMATIC AND RISKY IMPROVEMENT IN HIS PARTY POSITION IN RETURN FOR SACRIFICING AN ADMINISTRATIVE FUNCTION WHICH HE AND MOST OTHERS BELIEVED WAS ALREADY HIS.

4. IT DID NOT SEEM LIKELY, THEREFORE, THAT TENG AND

HIS FACTION WOULD HAVE FAVORED THE ACCESSION OF HUA, AND TENG SHOULD THEREFORE BE CONSIDERED TO HAVE LOST GROUND AT LEAST TEMPORARILY, AND PERHAPS IRREMEDIABLY. DUZER NOTED THAT WE WERE STILL IN A PERIOD WHEN FOREIGN POLICY WAS VERY IMPORTANT, AND IT WAS UNLIKELY THAT HUA COULD QUICKLY REMEDY THIS GAP IN HIS BACKGROUND. THE PRC WOULD THEREFORE BE SOMEWHAT HANDICAPPED IN ITS
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FOREIGN RELATIONS, A DISADVANTAGE FOR THE WEST. (COMMENT: IT ALSO SEEMED THAT THE GOF REGRETTED THE ECLIPSE OF TENG BECAUSE HE HAS SHOWN A PARTICULAR INTEREST IN FRANCE.)

5. IN A SEPARATE CONVERSATION GENERAL JACQUES GUILLERMAZ, THE EMINENT MODERN CHINA-WATCHER (AND FORMER MILITARY ATTACHE IN PEKING) EXPRESSED SOME OF THE SAME SENTIMENTS OF SURPRISE AND CONFUSION AS TO WHAT THE DEVELOPMENT MEANS. GUILLERMAZ NOTED HE HAD ALREADY EXPRESSED THE VIEW FOLLOWING CHOU'S DEATH (FIGARO) THAT IT WAS PERHAPS UNFORTUNATE FOR THE MODERATES -- AND HENCE FOR THE WEST -- THAT CHOU DIED BEFORE MAO SINCE A REASONABLE, PREARRANGED SCENARIO WOULD HAVE HAD BETTER CHANCES OF BEING IMPLEMENTED IF MAO HAD DIED FIRST. GUILLERMAZ COMMENTED THAT EVEN THOUGH THE NOMINATION OF HUA WAS A SETBACK FOR TENG PERSONALLY, IT WOULD NOT NECESSARILY BE A SETBACK FOR MODERATE POLICIES. GUILLERMAZ COMMENTED THAT HUA WAS NOT WELL KNOWN, BUT HE DID NOT CREDIT REPORTS THAT HUA HAD BEEN ON THE SIDE OF THE IDEOLOGUES DURING THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION.

COMMENT: THE FRENCH ARE AS MUCH TAKEN BY SURPRISE AS EVERYONE ELSE OVER HUA'S NOMINATION. THEY WILL APPRECIATE AN EXCHANGE OF VIEWS CONCERNING WHAT THIS MAY MEAN FOR CHINA AND FOR THE WEST. WE WOULD APPRECIATE BEING ON DISTRIBUTION OF MESSAGES GIVING US VIEWS ON THE SUBJECT.
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